

There is little to no representation of Black and Brown people in our communities. Our schools have very few faculty of color and those who enter are hard to retain. Local business owned and operated by people of color are also, few and very far between. This lack of diversity is represented in our political sphere as and within law enforcement. People of Color in Vermont are invisible.

I have been followed in more stores in more stores and more obviously in Vermont than I have in my life. Our Dean of Students was forced to confront Windsor County police for the unfair and disproportionate amount of stops of students of color going to and from school. Students were afraid to drive to the grocery store because it was so bad. It is no secret that Black people make up about 1% of this state, yet 10% percent of the prison population.... I have a better chance of meeting black people in prison in a state, that hardly has any to begin with. How does that add up? How is it that People of Color in Vermont are both invisible, yet, targeted? I'll tell you. It is called Unconscious bias. I will not go into a lengthy discussion about unconscious bias right now. Hopefully most of you listening are already aware and for those of you who are not, you will take the time to learn. Unconscious bias takes many shapes and forms, but it is a problem that is most persuasive through the thoughts and actions of those who don't realize that they're doing it. While Vermont as a state is by in large progressive, this does not mean it gets it right at all turne. In a space where you are not represented and your voice is not heard, you end up defenseless and at the hands of preconceived notions of who you are by people who not only have never met you, but do know anybody like you. We are invisible because our demographics are so small. We NEED this oversight board, so that we can be advocated for in the spaces that would otherwise be closed off to us. The people of color you are hearing from today are a select few, who have the ability, the time, and the privilege to come and express our opinions to you today. However, the reality remains that there are thousands around the state of Vermont who need this. They are your constituents and your neighbors. They are your family. They are your friends. This bill is directly addressing the issue of systemic racism that is prevalent nationally. Our state has a chance to be at the forefront of justice, and now more than ever it is imperative that we make a mark and take this stand. This past week we just watched as profiling has been used by Federal agents to detain activist in the migrant community. Look at that for what it is: That was used as a tool to silence the 1st amendment rights of freedom of speech, a right granted to all within our borders to speak out and advocate for their own well being. This is a means to silence the movement and send a message to all others involved. - By adopting this bill, you are taking preemptive steps towards navigating the murky and uncertain political climate of the next few years, and laying the groundwork to protect Vermonters and vulnerable communities who contribute positively to our economy and society. - Through this bill, we can live up to the promises of Governor Scott protect vermonters from the onslaught of unjust policies being pushed forth by the current Trump Administration. Thank you. Jeffrey P. Caesar, Burlington